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Written statement* submitted by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Freedom of Expression in Sudan*

Mindful of the fact that freedom of expression, a fundamental right in itself, is essential for facilitating national dialogue, consolidating the peace process, enhancing the democratic transformation and ensuring the rule of law, Sudan has witnessed a wave of censorship and other violations of the right to freedom of expression for years. The Sudanese Human Rights Defenders Network (SHRDN) is deeply concerned over an ongoing government crackdown on freedom of expression and harassment of journalists and human rights defenders.

The National Intelligence Security Service (NISS) routinely imposes restrictions on people's rights, including incidents of violence, arbitrary arrests, confiscation of newspapers' print runs, pressing legal proceedings against journalists, internet filtering and blocking, national shutdowns of communications networks, and other forms of intimidating measures targeting human rights defenders and journalists, including those who perform their work and activities online. The NISS Act (2010) gives security officers power to spy, to intercept the communications of any citizen without judicial permission, and to track them in real time.[1] Using sophisticated computer spyware and other technology, Sudan's NISS manipulates information and spies on the online communications of journalists, activists, HRDs and opposition parties.

A new draft of the Press and Publications Act has been tabled in the parliament, which includes articles restricting freedom of expression and internet media activities. The new draft law gives more power to the National Press and Publications Council, a governmental body, to impose fines, punish newspapers, and cancel newspapers' registrations as well as journalists' licences.

The SHRDN expresses deep concerns about the repression of journalists as well as the targeting of media institutions via pre-publication and post-publication censorship. Journalists, columnists and opinion writers are prohibited from writing or commenting on certain public matters that are considered "red lines", such as reports on corruption, human rights violations, especially in Darfur, reports on rape, and any news about the International Criminal Court case against Sudan.

According to Journalists for Human Rights (JHR)[2], 66 cases of confiscation of newspapers, detention, court cases and harassment of journalists have occurred since the beginning of this year. The government confiscated at least 45 issues of newspapers on different occasions in the last few months. The government recently announced in the local media that they will establish a special court for journalists, social media activists, advocates and bloggers.

Madeeha Abdela, editor in- chief of the newspaper *Al-Midan*, is facing a possible death sentence on a charge of crimes against the state brought by the NISS.[3] The charges against her, brought on 13 January of this year, appear to have been prompted by an interview with one of the military commanders of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), a separatist movement based in North Kurdufan state. The government has banned all media coverage of Sudan's rebel movements.

During the April 2015 elections, the NISS carried out a repressive campaign against journalists and human rights defenders who reported on the elections, which were widely boycotted. Journalists were subjected to internal and

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1 http://www.giswatch.org/en/country-report/communications-surveillance/sudan

2 http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article54822**Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

3 http://en.rsf.org/sudan-a-jouranlist-from-al-midan-21-01-2015,47523.html

external pressure, and the NISS warned all newspaper editors not to publish any articles or news that shed light on "negative news" or any reports on the "weak turnout" at the elections.

The Sudanese Human Rights Defenders Network is deeply concerned over the security and safety of digital activists, HRDs, political opposition and youth activists, and the increasingly restrictive environment for journalists. Journalists' safety and security are threatened by the ongoing impunity for those committing violations against journalists. On 18 July 2014, armed assailants attacked Osman Mirghani, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Al-Tayyar*, and the office's equipment was looted. Until this date no charges have been pressed against the assailants.

The SHRDN calls upon the United Nations Human Rights Council to urge the government of Sudan to respect its international and regional human rights obligations and to:

- End the harassment and arbitrary detentions of journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders.
- Respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and association throughout Sudan, in accordance with its constitutional and international human rights obligations.
- End media censorship and all forms of restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom online and offline.
- Pass legislation and adopt practices to protect journalists and human rights defenders

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*Sudanese Human Rights Defenders Network (SHRDN), NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.